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## The 3 Facebook Settings Every User Should Check Now

By SARAH PEREZ of [ReadWriteWeb](#)

In December, [Facebook made a series of bold and controversial changes regarding the nature of its users' privacy](#) on the social networking site. The company once known for protecting privacy to the point of exclusivity (it began its days as a network for college kids only - no one else even had access), now seemingly wants to compete with more open social networks like the microblogging media darling [Twitter](#).

Those of you who edited your privacy settings prior to December's change have nothing to worry about - that is, assuming you elected to keep your personalized settings [when prompted by Facebook's "transition tool."](#) The tool, a dialog box explaining the changes, appeared at the top of Facebook homepages this past month with its own selection of recommended settings. Unfortunately, most Facebook users likely opted for the recommended settings without really understanding what they were agreeing to. If you did so, you may now be surprised to find that you inadvertently gave Facebook the right to publicize your private information including status updates, photos, and shared links.

Want to change things back? Read on to find out how.

### 1. Who Can See The Things You Share (Status Updates, Photo, Videos, etc.)

Probably the most critical of the "privacy" changes (yes, we mean those quotes sarcastically) was the change made to status updates. Although there's now a button beneath the status update field that lets you select who can view any particular update, the new Facebook default for this setting is "Everyone." And by everyone, they mean everyone.

If you accepted the new recommended settings then you voluntarily gave Facebook the right to share the information about the items you post with any user or application on the site. Depending on your search settings, you may have also given Facebook the right to share that information with search engines, too.

To change this setting back to something of a more private nature, do the following:

1. From your Profile page, hover your mouse over the Settings menu at the top right and click "Privacy Settings" from the list that appears.
2. Click "Profile Information" from the list of choices on the next page.
3. Scroll down to the setting "Posts by Me." This encompasses anything you post, including status updates, links, notes, photos, and videos.
4. Change this setting using the drop-down box on the right. We recommend the "Only Friends" setting to ensure that only those people you've specifically added as a friend on the network can see the things you post.

### 2. Who Can See Your Personal Info

Facebook has a section of your profile called "personal info," but it only includes your interests, activities, and favorites. Other arguably more personal information is not encompassed by the "personal info" setting on Facebook's Privacy Settings page. That other information includes things like your birthday, your religious and political views, and your relationship status.

After last month's privacy changes, Facebook set the new defaults for this other information to viewable by either "Everyone" (for family and relationships, aka relationship status) or to "Friends of Friends" (birthday, religious and political views). Depending on your own preferences, you can update each of these fields as you see fit. However, we would

bet that many will want to set these to "Only Friends" as well. To do so:

1. From your Profile page, hover your mouse over the Settings menu at the top right and click "Privacy Settings" from the list that appears.
2. Click "Profile Information" from the list of choices on the next page.
3. The third, fourth, and fifth item listed on this page are as follows: "birthday," "religious and political views," and "family and relationship." Locking down birthday to "Only Friends" is wise here, especially considering information such as this is often used in identity theft.
4. Depending on your own personal preferences, you may or may not feel comfortable sharing your relationship status and religious and political views with complete strangers. And keep in mind, any setting besides "Only Friends" is just that - a stranger. While "Friends of Friends" sounds innocuous enough, it refers to everyone your friends have added as friends, a large group containing hundreds if not thousands of people you don't know. All it takes is one less-than-selective friend in your network to give an unsavory person access to this information.

### 3. What Google Can See - Keep Your Data Off the Search Engines

When you visit Facebook's Search Settings page, a warning message pops up. Apparently, Facebook wants to clear the air about what info is being indexed by Google. The message reads:

There have been misleading rumors recently about Facebook indexing all your information on Google. This is not true. Facebook created public search listings in 2007 to enable people to search for your name and see a link to your Facebook profile. They will still only see a basic set of information.

While that may be true to a point, the second setting listed on this Search Settings page refers to exactly what you're allowing Google to index. If the box next to "Allow" is checked, you're giving search engines the ability to access and index any information you've marked as visible by "Everyone." As you can see from the settings discussed above, if you had not made some changes to certain fields, you would be sharing quite a bit with the search engines...probably more information than you were comfortable with. To keep your data private and out of the search engines, do the following:

1. From your Profile page, hover your mouse over the Settings menu at the top right and click "Privacy Settings" from the list that appears.
2. Click "Search" from the list of choices on the next page.
3. Click "Close" on the pop-up message that appears.
4. On this page, uncheck the box labeled "Allow" next to the second setting "Public Search Results." That keeps all your publicly shared information (items set to viewable by "Everyone") out of the search engines. If you want to see what the end result looks like, click the "see preview" link in blue underneath this setting.

### Take 5 Minutes to Protect Your Privacy

While these three settings are, in our opinion, the most critical, they're by no means the only privacy settings worth a look. In [a previous article](#) (written prior to December's changes, so now out-of-date), we also looked at things like who can find you via Facebook's own search, application security, and more.

While you may think these sorts of items aren't worth your time now, the next time you lose out on a job because the [HR manager viewed your questionable Facebook photos](#) or saw something inappropriate a friend posted on your wall, you may have second thoughts. But why wait until something bad happens before you address the issue?

Considering that Facebook itself is no longer looking out for you, it's time to be proactive about things and look out for yourself instead. Taking a few minutes to run through all the available privacy settings and educating yourself on what they mean could mean the world of difference to you at some later point...That is, unless [you agree with Facebook](#) in thinking that the world is becoming more open and therefore you should too.

Note: Other resources on Facebook's latest changes worth reading include [MakeUseOf's 8 Steps Toward Regaining your Privacy](#), [17 steps to protect your privacy from Inside Facebook](#), [the ACLU's article examining the changes](#), and [DotRights.org's comprehensive analysis of the new settings](#). If you're unhappy enough to protest Facebook's privacy update, you can [sign ACLU's petition](#). The [FTC is also looking into the matter](#) thanks to a complaint filed by a coalition of privacy groups, led by the Electronic Privacy Information Center. You can add your voice to the list of complaints [here](#).

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